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Possessions of school-aged children

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POSSESSIONS OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

A Thesis

Presented to the

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by

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study was designed to investigate school-aged children's possessions and their meanings, as well as the fate of early treasured objects. Also, it examined the influences of familial variables on the persistence of early object attachments into middle childhood. The sample was comprised of 60, 10- to 11-year old children (n= 20 males, n= 40 females) and their mothers. Mothers completed a 26-item questionnaire to yield information about their child's earliest and current treasured possessions, and familial varibles that influenced their persistence. An 11-item, child interview was used to determine which objects were especially treasured during early life, their persistence into later years, and what possessions were currently treasured. It was found that early treasured object use often persists into middle childhood, providing symbolic and passive enjoyment, as well as the comfort and security it originally represented. Object persistence was shown to be positively correlated with children sleeping in their own room, and high maternal nurturance. It was also found that while certain objects changed with age, the meanings remained relatively similar over time. Finally, there were significant sex differences in objects named, their meanings and how they were used.

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Introduction

Children under the age of four often develop tenacious and persistent attachments to tattered blankets or stuffed animals. Sometimes the object and child seem to be inseparable; more often, a child will go to the object for brief periods of time during the day to stroke or cuddle it for a moment, and then, seemingly refreshed, go on to other activities. Research on the infant and early childhood years suggests that these inanimate objects provide comfort and security for their owners, particularly at bedtime and during times of stress. Little research, however, has focused on meanings and functions of transitional objects for individuals after the early childhood years. Whether comfort and security continue to be the primary meanings and functions of treasured objects during middle childhood, for example, is unknown. The current study is an in-depth analysis of school-aged children's possessions and their meanings, including an examination of the fate of these earliest treasured possessions. In addition, this study seeks to examine the role of familial variables (found to influence children's attachments to objects in early life) in the persistence of early object attachments into the school-age years.

Transitional Object Use in Infancy and Early Childhood

The term "transitional object" refers to an infant's

attachment to an inanimate object -- e.g., a blanket, or a woolly or soft toy -- which is treasured and cherished by the infant. Much has been written about transitional or treasured object use in infancy and early childhood. Winnicott (1953) first described the transitional object as a blanket, cloth, or part of a sheet that becomes extremely valuable to an infant (4- to 12-mos. of age) when under stress and preparing for sleep. He described these objects as the first "not-me" possessions for children, and theorized that by using these objects a child can manage the stresses and anxieties of separation from mother by symbolically recreating union with her.

Functions of transitional objects. Transitional objects function in a number of ways for the infant and young child. It has been postulated that the transitional object symbolically represents the mother, reunion with the mother, or certain functional properties of the mother (Busch, Nagera, McKnight, & Pezzarossi, 1973; Gaddini, 1970; Greenacre, 1969; Tolpin, 1971; Winnicott, 1953). Research over the years has suggested that transitional objects provide comfort and security during the early years of life, particularly at bedtime, during anxiety-producing situations, and during separations from the primary caregiver (Kamptner, Kayano, & Peterson, 1989). They appear to decrease and regulate anxiety in strange situations because of their soothing and comforting

qualities (Gershaw & Schwarz, 1971; Passman, 1977; Passman & Weisberg, 1975). Margaret Mahler (1975) has also suggested that the transitional object plays a facilitating role in the separation-individuation process, allowing the infant to physically move away from mother while at the same time holding on to a part of her. Thus, the child remains symbolically related to mother while physically and psychically being separated from her.

Using a controlled experimental setting, Passman and Weisberg (1975) investigated the tendency of children to move to their special blanket in preference to other objects, as well as their mother. They found that the security blanket, for a child who is attached to it, is as effective as a child's mother in inhibiting distress while simultaneously promoting play and exploration in a novel environment.

Psychoanalytic theorists view attachment to objects as both healthy and beneficial to psychological development. Donald Winnicott (1953), for example, viewed children's attachments to inanimate objects as an essential phase of ego development during which the child establishes a separate sense of self, distinct from all other parts of the external environment. Object relations theorists believe that the transitional object carries many significant meanings. Tolpin (1971) and Coppolilo (1967), believe that a transitional object assists the infant in

the separation-individuation process while establishing a cohesive self. By providing gratification unavailable from the real mother, the soothing gradually becomes internalized. Metcalf and Spitz (1978), on the other hand, suggest that transitional object use helps the infant distinguish between fantasy and fact, aids in the development of symbolic thinking, and may even provide a foundation for dreaming, imagination, and creativity. In sum, research suggests that the blanket (or other such attachment object) can have an adaptive and positive role.

The transitional object is typically used in conjunction with oral gratification behaviors such as the sucking of thumb and fingers, pacifier, or bottle. While sucking on something, the transitional object is handled and fondled by the child (Busch et al., 1973; Gay & Hyson, 1977; Litt, 1986). Although children often use their object in more than one way, most of them seem to be attracted to the "tactile" aspects of the loved object; i.e., they stroke it, rub it, or hug it (Busch, 1973; Busch, 1974; Hong, 1978; Hong & Townes, 1976). Transitional objects are not abused or mishandled by the child, but rather are treated as "treasured possessions" (Busch et al., 1973).

Boniface and Graham (1979) found that children who use a transitional object at bedtime and during other times of stress have fewer sleep disturbances, are more independent, and are generally easier to manage than

children who do not have such objects. Children with such object attachments tend to be more self-confident, more outgoing in relation to adults, openly affectionate to mothers, and less likely to manifest tension habits under stress (Mahalski, 1983). Furthermore, a higher incidence of hyperactive, aggressive, and delinquent behaviors have been reported in non-transitional object users (Litt, 1986). This report is consistent with the traditional notion that the transitional object plays a role in tension reduction and impulse control.

Primary and secondary objects. Busch et al. (1973) observed that there were two distinct "categories" of objects that children become attached to at different times in their lives. The object that a child becomes attached to within the first year of life has been labeled as the 'primary transitional object', whereas the object to which a child develops an attachment during the toddler years has been labeled as the 'secondary transitional object'.

Busch et al. (1973) developed six criteria for identifying primary transitional objects. First, these objects must manifest themselves within the first year of life. Second, the object use must be of lasting duration (i.e., used longer than one year). Third, the presence of the object must be soothing to the child and decrease anxiety. Fourth, the object cannot directly meet an oral

or biological need (e.g., a bottle or pacifier). Fifth, the object must be "created" by the infant and not merely given to the child by the parent (e.g., pacifiers). Sixth, the object cannot be part of infant's body (e.g., thumb or finger).

Hong (1978) defined "secondary" transitional objects as soft cuddly toys such as teddy bears, soft dolls, and, infrequently, some hard toys. This category differs from primary transitional objects by a later time of onset.

Although the distinction between these two types of objects is important, it should be noted that there is no objective evidence suggesting that children use these two types of objects in different ways. Gaddini (1975) believes the distinction between these two types of objects is merely quantitative rather than qualitative in character. In both cases the child turns to an object for comfort when feeling anxious (e.g., when preparing for sleep or during separations from the mother).

The objects children overwhelmingly prefer during infancy and early childhood are blankets, diapers, and bits of cloth (Litt, 1986). Blankets with a silky binding are preferred the most and the binding is the part to which a child is most attached (Gay & Hyson, 1977). The next most preferred objects are soft toys like stuffed animals and teddy bears (Litt, 1986). There also appears to be a relationship between the mother's clothing while nursing

and the tactile characteristics of the transitional object:

> "Five mothers were quite convinced that the child became attached to a specific object because it resembled the clothing the mother wore while nursing him. One mother usually nursed the baby with her sweater pushed up and resting against the baby's nose; the child now sniffs her woolly blanket and rubs it against her nose.....Another mother remembers wearing silky robes while nursing her baby; the child now rubs the silky binding of her blanket and sometimes rythmically strokes her mother's stockings or scarf if the blanket is not available" (Gay & Hyson, 1977, pg.280).

Influences on Object Attachment

Among the influences encountered in infancy and early childhood, the experiences that preclude attachment to transitional objects are known with more certainty than those experiences that encourage it. It is known, for instance, that if a child has not had a positive nurturing experience, he or she does not seem to be able to invent that experience with the use of a transitional object (Deri, 1978; Horton & Sharp, 1984).

Transitional object use has been related to child-rearing practices, particularly to the mother's nurturing ability. Several theorists believe that transitional object use is an indication of a healthy mother-child relationship. Winnicott (1953) postulated that the child's use of a transitional object testifies to a satisfactory nurturing relationship between mother and child. This 'good-enough mothering' suggests that an infant has a sense of being cared for and loved; and that a "significant other" in an infant's life has provided

the warmth, cuddling, and attention needed for him or her to develop a sense of trust. Without such a 'good-enough' relationship, the child would be unable to transfer the soothing properties of mother to some object at hand and subsequently through the use of that object develop the capacity for self-soothing (Deri, 1978).

Incidence of transitional object use after infantile colic. Horton and Sharp (1984) believe that infants reared without reliable comforting do not develop transitional object attachments. Jonsson and Taje (1983) did a study on "good-enough" mothering and the incidence of transitional objects after infantile colic. They found that infants with colic were less likely to attach to transitional objects, and also suggested that infantile colic generates needs that cannot be satisfied by the mother. Furthermore, infants with colic are very frustrating for parents. Thus, for an infant with colic, the mother cannot be "good enough" for the development of a transitional object. In a study by Parker (1980), for example, only one out of seven insecurely attached infants had a transitional object.

Incidence of transitional object use in institutionalized infants. One way of studying transitional object phenomena is by looking at deprived children who lack parents. Provence and Lipton (1962) reported that deprived institutionalized infants do not develop attachments to blankets or soft objects. The number of

adults taking care of infants is low in an institution; therefore, these infants are viewed as being deprived of 'good enough' mothering.

Parents' expectations and motivations. In a study by Busch et al., (1973), parents' conscious expectations of whether a child would attach to an object were not found to be an important factor in the child's development of an object attachment. However, unconscious parental motivations (i.e., parent unconsciously encouraged or discouraged the use of an object) seemed to determine whether parents served as either facilitators or disturbers of a child's relationship with a transitional object. Parents do not give the child the transitional object. Rather, the infant discovers and empowers the object and uses it for himself or herself. The major parental role in object attachment seems to be at an unconscious level as a facilitator. That is, the parent may or may not allow the child the freedom to engage in attachment to a transitional object. Litt (1983), in her study of maternal attitudes and expectations, found that 21% of parents surveyed reported that they had encouraged the attachment originally by either consistently placing a diaper under the infant's head to protect the bedding, or by making sure that a special blanket or toy was always with the child at bedtime or naptime. These parents also carried these objects on outings away from home to be sure the

child would have a familiar object with him or her in strange surroundings.

Transitional object use in different cultures. In an attempt to study object use among children from different cultures and to explore the conditions under which the attachment behavior develops, Hong and Townes (1976) explored three types of infants with the use of a 44-item questionnaire. Information obtained concerned the infant's background (e.g., age, sex, birth order, birth weight, and physical health), feeding practices, sleeping arrangements, primary caretakers, and attachment behavior to inanimate objects. It was found that the incidence of infant attachment behaviors to blankets and pacifiers was highest in the American, lowest in the Korean infants raised in Korea, and intermediate in the Korean infants reared in America. It was also found that a greater number of Korean infants slept in the same room with their mothers and were breast-fed longer than the American infants.

A study of three different social groups in Italy found that 4.9% of rural Italian children, 31% of urban Italian children, and 62% of foreign children (of primarily Anglo-Saxon origin living in Rome) developed attachments to transitional objects (Gaddini & Gaddini, 1970). In the group of foreign children, 32% of the parents reported that their children slept in their (i.e., the parents') bed or room, which contrasts with the rural group of

parents--77% of this group reported that their children slept in their bed or room. This study, as well as the one described above, suggests that attachment to an inanimate object may be associated with child-rearing practices, especially those related to the circumstances associated with bedtime and the amount of physical contact (including breastfeeding). Hong and Townes (1976) suggest that in an urban environment there is often less physical contact due to parental absences, so it is more likely and necessary for a child to develop a "symbol" of the mother.

Transitional object use as a cognitive and developmental marker. Transitional object use has also been described as a cognitive and developmental marker. Sherman and Hertzig (1983), for example, found that developmentally disordered patients had a dramatically reduced frequency of transitional object use. They found that autistic children, who have severe social and communicative problems, rarely become attached to objects. When they do, the objects are more likely to be a matchbox car, a piece of rubber band, or a nail or screw. These children do not seem to use their objects for comfort in times of obvious distress. Attachment to a treasured object before age 2 was reported in none of the 21 mentally retarded children. Other studies have found that mentally retarded children do become attached to objects, but at

later ages (Sherman & Hertzig, 1983).

Surveys indicate that attachment to treasured objects among normal children is neither universal nor unusual. Sherman, Hertzig, Austrian, & Shapiro (1981) found that slightly over half (54%) of normally-developing middle class children living in New York City became attached to a particular treasured object during the first two years of life. The highest incidence of transitional object attachment reported in a study is 77%, found in middle-class American children aged 2 to 5 years (Litt, 1981). The lowest incidence noted is 18% in a study in Britain of 702 three-year-olds (Boniface & Graham, 1979).

Summary. In summary, research suggests that transitional objects have an adaptive and positive role during infancy and early childhood. It appears that transitional objects serve the following functions: 1) they provide warmth and security during anxiety-producing situations; 2) they play a facilitating role in the separation-individuation process; 3) they appear to promote play and exploration in novel environments; 4) they may aid in the development of symbolic thinking; and 5) they may testify to a satisfactory nurturing relationship between mother and child. It also appears that transitional object attachment may be associated with childrearing practices, especially those circumstances associated with bedtime and the amount of physical contact. Lastly, there appears

to be a relationship with mother's clothing while nursing and the tactile characteristics of the transitional object.

Transitional Object Use After Early Childhood

The little research available on object attachment after the early years of life suggests that continued use of objects to which individuals became attached during early life dwindles with age as children move through the middle childhood (Sherman et al., 1981) and adolescent (Shafii, 1985) years. Nevertheless, it seems clear that personal possessions play a salient role throughout individuals' lives. They become symbols of one's past and one's ties with others, and silently communicate one's values and beliefs (e.g., Csikzentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Furby, 1978; Rochberg-Halton, 1984). The soft objects that are comforting in early life, however, give way to different kinds of favored objects in adolescence and beyond, suggesting discontinuity in object salience and function with age.

Middle childhood. Winnicott (1953) and Coppollilo (1974) have described weaning from the transitional object as a gradual "decathexis"; i.e., it slowly becomes extinct through lack of need. They suggest that the transitional object is not missed or mourned, nor is the need for it repressed. External pressures also provide a strong impetus for the relinquishment of the object. As a child attends school, he or she is faced with social pressures in the

form of peer ridicule if the object is brought to school (Busch, 1974).

Greenacre (1969) theorized that the attachment ends in the oedipal period or during latency (i.e., middle childhood). Tolpin (1971), also without data, agreed with Winnicott's position and stated that the transitional object is normally not missed because it is simply no longer needed. The tension-regulating and tension-reducing effects of maternal soothing are suggested to be replaced by self-soothing.

In a study of school-aged children by Sherman et al. (1981), data on transitional object use were collected from parents of 171 normal children between 9 and 13 years of age. Among the 171 children, 54% were "users" and stated that they had had an attachment to an object in infancy. In addition, 50% of the "users" retained their attachment to their treasured objects until age 9 or beyond and used them for soothing purposes. This study found that transitional objects often persist into the tenth year of life and beyond. The object may not be regularly used but may be kept in an accessible place where it can be handled during particularly stressful occasions. Their study found that number of siblings, object use by a sibling, ordinal rank of the child in the family, parents' marital status, sex of the child, history of parental object use, sleeping arrangements of the child, history of

thumb-sucking, and ease of care of the child in infancy were all unrelated to the development of an attachment to an object. The researchers found no significant differences between users and nonusers of transitional objects in respect to behavioral or somatic symptoms, adaptability, or independence.

Only one study has examined possessions currently valued by children. A study by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) looked at three generations of family members to explore differences in objects considered to be "most special". They noted that older children and adolescents preferred action-oriented objects with egocentric meanings (i.e., bikes, cars, stereos, etc.), whereas their adult subjects preferred objects with interpersonal meanings (i.e., heirlooms, picture albums, objects given to them by a friend, etc.). In the "childhood" group, however, ages of participants ranged from 8 to 30 years.

Adolescence. Kamptner (1989) suggests that the majority of literature on possessions and adolescents tends to be psychoanalytically-oriented, emphasizing a persistence of function of these early objects into adolescence -- i.e., that possessions especially salient to adolescents function in ways that are similar to trnsitional objects in the infancy and early childhood years (e.g., providing feelings of security and comfort which in turn assists

individuals in the separation-individuation process). However, she found that the instrumental qualities of possessions are most prevalent during the adolescent years (Kamptner, 1991). Early treasured possessions (e.g., teddy bears, blankets, etc.) appeared to hold nostalgic meanings for individuals, while music-related items were named as "most comforting" possessions.

Adulthood. Although there is little written about object use in adulthood, it appears that personal belongings may also play a meaningful role in adults' lives. Possessions act as sources of control and mastery, moderators of affect, cultivators of the self, symbols of the self, symbols of ties with others, and memories of the past (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg- Halton, 1981; Furby, 1978; Rochberg-Halton, 1984).

In Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) study described above, an increase in meanings relating to the past with age was found, as was a steady decrease in self-related meanings of treasured possessions with age. They speculated that the age differences in the study indicated the role of objects at various points in the life cycle. In a study done by Kamptner (1989), older adults were asked which objects were especially comforting when they were lonely, upset, afraid, or anxious. The subjects named primarily small appliances (46.8%, which included mainly televisions) and books (23.4%). Compared

to the early years of life where physical tactile-comfort is an effective tension-reducer, the later years of life seem to employ more "mental" strategies such as diverting one's attention.

Summary. In summary, research suggests that continued use of early transitional objects dwindles with age as children move through the middle childhood and adolescent years. Literature across the life span indicates, however, that certain personal possessions continue to play meaningful roles in peoples' lives -- e.g., in defining the self, and as symbolizing one's past, one's experiences, and one's ties with others. Also, whereas the tactile qualities of an object are comforting during the early years of life, objects which embody more "mental strategies" (e.g., diverting one's attention) become comforting objects in the later years.

Summary and Purpose of Study

In summary, the use and functions of transitional objects appear to be healthy and to have positive developmental benefits during early life. Writings to date suggest that these early objects of affection provide warmth and security during the infant and early childhood years, particularly during times of stress. "Object attached" children appear to be more self-confident and outgoing in relation to adults (Mahalski, 1983). In addition, object relations theorists believe that

transitional object use assists an infant in the separation-individuation process and helps unfold symbolic thinking.

Although no consistency has been found regarding the influences that mandate the development of a child's attachment to a transitional object, it is clear that some standards are necessary. Many theorists believe that object attachment testifies to a satisfactory nurturing relationship between mother and child (Deri, 1978; Winnicott, 1953). From this it could be concluded that a "good-enough mothering" experience is the prerequisite to the development of a transitional object. On the other hand, it appears that there are higher frequencies of transitional object use among those with lower degrees of maternal contact, especially at bedtime (Gaddini, 1970; Hong & Townes, 1976). The development of an object attachment appears to be inversely correlated with the quality and quantity of physical contact with the mothering person.

Evidence shows that transitional object use dwindles with age as children move through middle childhood (Sherman et al., 1981). Parents, pediatricians, and child psychologists alike have wondered about the significance of continued transitional object use into middle childhood. The practical problem exists for these professionals in advising parents about the management of their children

when their attachment to an object persists (Kahne, 1967). Only one study to date has included older children in examining the meanings and functions of objects; however, the age range of "children" in this study actually included individuals who ranged in age from middle childhood through early adulthood (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

It is peculiar that there have been few actual studies regarding the meaning and fate of the infant's first treasured object. Sherman et al.'s (1981) study, which is the single study to date that focused solely on a school-aged children, explored behavioral characteristics of users and non-users, parental attitudes, and family demographics relating to object attachment. The functions and meanings attributed to these possessions, however, were not examined.

Present study. We live in a society where we surround ourselves with objects, and possessions play an important role in our lives. Given the fact that there has been very limited research regarding possessions and their meanings after the early childhood years, the purpose of the current exploratory study was to address what material objects are especially valued (and why) during middle childhood, and the fate of (and influences on the persistence of) older children's earliest object attachments. The specific goals of this study include the following:

(1) To determine the persistence of early treasured objects into the middle childhood years, including how they are used and what they mean for the child in the middle childhood years. Whether comfort and security continue to be the primary meanings and functions of early treasured objects that persist into the middle childhood years is unknown. (Whereas Sherman and Hertzig [1981] looked at treasured object use in a school-aged population, they did not examine the meanings and functions of these early treasured objects for the child during the middle childhood years).

(2) To examine the effect of physical contact between parent and child, parental behaviors regarding the object, and the influence of maternal nurturance on the persistence of early object attachments (and meanings) into the middle childhood years. Since these family variables have been found to be influential in the development of attachments to objects in early life, these variables will be examined in relation to older children's continued attachments to objects.

(3) To determine what possessions are especially valued during middle childhood, including how they are used, what they mean for the child,

and how they compare to objects treasured during the early years of life. (Whereas Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton [1981] explored the meanings and functions of children's objects, they did not look specifically at a school-aged population) In addition, sex differences will be examined since previous studies have found sex to be a significant influence on object and object meaning preferences (Kamptner, 1989).

METHOD

Subjects

The participants were 60 10- and 11-year old children and their mothers from two elementary schools located in Yucaipa and Calimesa. Mothers and children were recruited with the help of the principals who wrote letters requesting participation in the study (See Appendix I). Mothers were primarily caucasian, had received some college education, and the majority were currently married (See Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Information on Children, Fathers, and Mothers (N=60)

Age

Child	Range:	10 years to 11 years of age (M=10 yrs.)
Mother	Range:	28 years to 58 years of age (M= 36 yrs.)

Parents' Education

Mother	3%	Have not finished high school
	21%	Graduated from high school
	10%	Trade school
	51%	Some college (include A.A. degree)
	5%	Graduated from college (B.A./B.S.)
	3%	Some post-graduate work
	8%	Graduate or professional degree
Father	6%	Have not finished high school
	32%	Graduated from high school
	3%	Trade school
	41%	Some college (include A.A. degree)
	15%	Graduated from college (B.A./B.S.)
	0%	Some post-graduate work
	3%	Graduate or professional degree

Ethnicity

0%	Asian
0%	Black
94%	Caucasian
6%	Hispanic
0%	Other

Marital Status of Mother

0%	Single
82%	Married
15%	Separated/divoriced
3%	Widowed
0	Other

Measures

To address the questions in this study, a child interview and a parent (i.e., mother) questionnaire were developed. The child interview examined the persistence of early objects into middle childhood, and which possessions were especially valued during the middle childhood years. The parent questionnaire was constructed to yield information about their child's earliest and current treasured possessions, familial influences on the persistence of children's earliest object attachments into the middle childhood years, and background (i.e., demographic) information.

Child interview. A 11-item interview, adapted from a questionnaire developed for a previous study of personal possessions (Kamptner, 1989), was used (See Appendix II). The purpose of this interview was to determine which objects were especially treasured during early life (and why), the persistence of early treasured objects into the childhood years, and what possessions are currently most treasured (and why). Specifically, subjects were asked about their earliest most treasured objects (i.e., special possessions between the ages of 1- and 4- years) -- if they were attached to such an object (and if so, what it was), why they thought it was special to them as a young them as a young child, when were they most likely to use the object, whether they still had the object, and why.

Subjects were asked which possessions they currently consider to be the most special or important of all they own (and why), and when these objects are "used". Lastly, subjects were asked to report their age and grade in school.

Mother questionnaire. A 27-item questionnaire based on Sherman et al.'s (1981) questionnaire was used (See Appendix III). The purpose of this questionnaire was to determine familial influences on the persistence of early treasured objects, and also to yield information (from the mother's point of view) about their child's earliest and current treasured possessions. Mothers (as opposed to fathers) were asked to complete the questionnaire because it was felt that they would generally be more familiar with these issues than fathers. The questionnaire was divided into the following six sections.

The first section pertained to their child's earliest treasured possessions (i.e., "most special" possessions between the ages of 1- to 4- years). Mothers were asked questions about whether their child had such an object, the description of the object, the objects' meanings and use, and the mothers' feelings towards the object.

The second section pertained to physical separations between mother and child. Mothers were asked about major separations between themselves and their child; for example, did marital status change? Mothers were also asked about their physical availability to the child and the child's

sleeping arrangements when the child was between the ages of 1 to 6-years.

The third section pertained to the child's current "most treasured" or favorite possession. Mothers were asked questions about whether their child had such an object, their (i.e., the mothers') feelings towards this object, how was the object "introduced", and their mother's physical availability to the child.

The fourth section pertained to physical contact. Mothers were asked questions about how much time they spend with their child on an average day hugging and holding, talking, reading, and playing.

The fifth section was a nurturance scale, derived from Satermoe, Widaman, and Borthwick-Duffy (1991). This survey was used to assess mother's nurturant behavior toward the child. This 12-item scale assessed parental acceptance, i.e., how much affection the child receives and how much impulse expression is allowed by the child. Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .68.

Lastly, mothers were asked about background information, including their age, marital status, ethnicity, their educational level, and their spouse's educational level.

Procedure

Fifth-grade classes were visited and given a brief description of the study. Permission slips were then sent home informing parents of the study and requesting their participation (See Appendix IV). When permission slips were returned to the child's teacher, the mother questionnaire was sent home with the child.

When the mother questionnaires were completed and returned to the experimenter, each child was taken individually by the experimenter to a room to conduct the child interview. The interview was administered during regular elementary school class sessions, and took approximately 10-15 minutes.

Coding of Data

A classification scheme developed by Kamptner, Kayano, and Peterson (1989) for the objects and objects meanings was used (Table 2 and 3).

Categories of Objects

1. Stuffed animals
2. Dolls
3. Pillows/blankets
4. Books
5. Clothing (clothing, nightgowns, hats, purses, shoes, etc.)
6. Childhood toys (trikes, wagons, toy cars, trucks, legos, tinker toys, jets, board games, toy soldiers, toy weapons, etc.)
7. Sporting Equipment (including fishing poles, skateboards, rollerblades, baton, football helmet, basketballs, skiis, guns, knives, etc.)
8. Motor vehicles (cars, motorcycles, boats, motor vehicle-related accessories)
9. Phonograph records/music (phonograph records and tapes, music, musical instruments, radio, stereo equipment)
10. Photographs (photos, photogaph albums, portraits)
11. Memorabilia (yearbooks, pennants, souvenirs, scrapbooks)
12. Personal accomplishment (awards, trophies, school letter, letterman's jacket, homecoming queen crown)
13. Furniture (furniture, antiques, rugs, lamps)
14. Dishware/silverware (dishware, china, glassware, silverware)
15. Jewelry (jewelry, watches)
16. Religious items (Bible, torah, rosary, etc.)
17. Collections (stamp, coin, shell, baseball cards, rock, trolls, porcelain dolls, etc.)
18. Small Appliances (Nintendo, camera, television, computer, VCR, videogames, walkie-talkie, clock radio, etc.)
19. Important Papers/Documents
20. Money
21. Visual artwork (includes drawings, statues, sculpture, etc.)
22. Tools
23. Personal items (jewelry boxes, perfume, wallets, flowers, car key, eye glasses, pens, pencils, music boxes, etc.)
24. Substance abuse items (drugs, drug paraphernalia, cigarettes, alcohol, etc.)
25. Food and/or food-related appliances
26. Posters, rock-star or idol paraphernalia (sports idols)
27. Magazines, comic books
28. Car insurance, driver's license, pilot's license
29. Written expression items (class notes, letters, poetry, journals, diaries, paper)
30. Bedroom, room, house.
31. Personal-care items (toothbrush, make-up, self-adornment, hair spray, hair dryer, mirror, etc.)
40. other (chemistry set, balloons, rabbits-foot, flags, aquarium, sewing machine, pet rock, pacifier)

TABLE 2

Table 3

Categories of Object Meanings

1) Utilitarian (object provides utilitarian benefits-- e.g., is useful, functional, or fills a need; provides convenience; provides independence)

2) Enjoyment (object provides enjoyment, "good" feelings, and enhances one's mood; provides feelings of "release" or relaxation; is soothing or comforting; provides feelings of security)

3) Intrinsic Quality (includes meanings related to physical, functional properties of object-- e.g., the object's monetary worth; its design, style, or color; the "ambiance" it provides; its being part of the decor or part of a collection; its "uniqueness", including it being "one of a kind" or "irreplaceable")

4) Activity (object is defined by what person does with it; active/interactive involvement with object is emphasized)

5) Nonsocial (object represents or reminds one of a specific occasion, place, or event-- no persons are mentioned)

6) Social (object represents interpersonal or familial ties-- e.g., object is a reminder of someone special; was given by or belonged to a family member or other special person; object represents attachment to or love toward another person)

7) Self (object represents or expresses aspects of the owner's self-- e.g., it is a reminder or representation of one's self, or personal history, "is a part of me", "looks like me", "represents who I am"; or it embodies or expresses one's personal values, goals, or ideals)

RESULTS

Persistence of Early Objects

Preliminary analyses. Since there were discrepancies between the child's and the mother's responses regarding early treasured objects, the child's responses only were used in the final analyses. This discrepancy deserves further attention in future studies.

Early treasured objects and meanings. Ninety percent of the total sample of children interviewed reported that they had had a 'treasured' possession as a young child. Subjects could name up to four treasured possessions. The objects most frequently named by the children were Pillows/Blankets, Stuffed Animals, and Childhood Toys (Table 4).

Table 4

Most Frequently Named Early Treasured Objects

Pillows/Blankets	42%
Stuffed Animals	37%
Childhood Toys	10%
Dolls	7%
Clothing	2%
Other	2%

When asked what single object was the "most" special, children named Pillows/Blankets, Stuffed Animals, and Dolls the most frequently (Table 5).

Table 5

Single Most Special Early Treasured Object

Pillows/Blankets	51%
Stuffed Animals	32%
Dolls	7%
Childhood Toys	4%
Other	6%

Tables 6 and 7 show the responses of the child interviews on the meanings of their early "treasured" objects and their "single most special" object. The results of these two object categories were the same. The meanings most often attributed to these objects were Social, Enjoyment, Intrinsic Qualities, and Self. The "Social" meanings given to these objects were one of two types: either it represented interpersonal or familial association (e.g., "My grandma made it for me"; "It was my Aunt's who lived in Wisconsin") or, it had qualities of a person, friend or companion with whom they talked or played (e.g., "He [a teddy bear] was my best friend in the whole world"; "I'd pretend it was real like my real dog"). "Enjoyment" referred primarily to security-related meanings (e.g.,

"It made me feel safe", "When I went to sleep it would be my protector"), whereas "Intrinsic Qualities" included meanings related to physical functional properties of the object (e.g., "It made me feel warm and cozy"; "I like the silky binding"). "Self" meanings referred to the notion that these objects were an intrinsic part of the subject's personal history (e.g., "I got it when I was real little"; "I had it ever since I was in the hospital as a preemie. It reminds me of when I was a baby").

Table 6

Most Frequently Named Meanings of Early Treasured Objects

	Total Group (N=55)
Social	36%
Enjoyment	27%
Intrinsic Qualities	15%
Self	9%
Activity	7%
Nonsocial	5%
Utilitarian	1%

Table 7

Most Frequently Named Meanings of Single "Most Special" Early Treasured Object

	Total Group (N=55)
Social	44%
Enjoyment	22%
Intrinsic Qualities	14%
Self	11%
Activity	5%
Nonsocial	2%
Utilitarian	2%

Use of early treasured objects in middle childhood. Seventy-two percent of the sample who reported that they had had a treasured object as a young child (i.e., 65% of the total sample) reported that they still have it. When subjects were asked when they currently "use" or "play with" these early treasured objects, the most frequent responses were that they used it at Bedtime/Sleep (35%), Play with it/Daytime Use (24%) and Rarely Use/Keep on a shelf or Bed (22%). Sixty percent of those who had a treasured object as a young child still considered their object to be very special in middle childhood.

Meanings of early treasured objects in middle childhood. When subjects were asked why they still had this object, the primary reasons given included the following: Social (e.g., "It reminds me of my grandma"; "My dad gave it to me"; "When my dad goes away it reminds me of him")(31%), Enjoyment (e.g., "It makes me feel safe and warm")(18%), and Self (e.g., "It is really special to me because it was my first real toy"; "It reminds me of the memories of my life")(16%).

Summary. In sum, treasured object use in early childhood appears to be a common phenomena. Ninety percent of the total sample reported an attachment to an object in early life, with 65% of the total sample still having it in middle childhood. Fifty-nine percent of the children who still have their object use it for bedtime or play

with it during the day. Twenty-two percent of the children who still have their object rarely use it, but instead keep it on a shelf or in a safe place. Early treasured object use, then, appears to persist into the middle childhood years, providing symbolic meanings for these children (i.e., symbolizing the self and others). The objects also continue to provide enjoyment for their owners in the middle childhood years, particularly in the areas of security and comfort. Comfort and security, then, are not the primary meanings and functions of early treasured objects in the middle childhood years (although they may still function in this manner at bedtime and during times of stress).

Influence of Family Variables on the Persistence of Early Object Attachments

To address the second question of this study, i.e., whether family variables influence the persistence of early object attachments into the middle childhood years, subjects who had early treasured objects were divided into two groups: those who still have their early object, and those who do not still have their early object. These groups were compared on the following familial variables: a) physical contact between parent and child, b) parental behaviors regarding the object, c) maternal nurturance, and d) family demographic variables (Table 8).

Results showed that there were no significant

differences between the two groups on physical contact between parent and child (i.e., time mother spends hugging/holding child, talking to child, and playing with child; hours per week mother worked; hours per week mother went to school; major separations between mother and child; marital status changed) (Table 8, top portion). However, children who slept in their own room were significantly more likely to still have their treasured object in middle childhood, and children who slept in a room with a sibling were significantly less likely to still have their treasured object.

For parental behaviors regarding the object, there were no significant differences between the two groups on whether mother encouraged the object's use (i.e., parent made object available, gave object to child to sleep with, or parent appreciates or values the object) (Table 8, middle portion). There were significant differences, however, between the two groups that showed that mothers of children who still have their object did not interfere or encourage the object's use (i.e., parent did not encourage child to sleep with it, or encourage child to take object on trips). These mothers were also significantly more likely to report having given their child their treasured object for comfort (compared to mothers of children who no longer owned their treasured object). Also, objects that were given to a child as a gift with no social or emotional

ties (i.e., gift has no symbolic meaning) were significantly more likely to be discarded in middle childhood compared to objects that had symbolic ties (i.e., object reminds child of a person or memory).

Third, children whose mothers scored high on the maternal nurturance scale were more likely to still have their objects (Table 8, lower middle portion).

Analyses were also conducted on certain family demographic variables, including maternal age, and maternal and paternal educational levels. None of these variables were significant (Table 8, bottom portion).

Table 8

Influence of Family Variables on the Persistence of Early Treasured Objects

	Group 1 (Still Have) Early Object (n=39)	Group 2 (Don't Have) Early Object (n=16)	Significance
a) Physical contact			
Child sleeps:			
own room	74%	50%	$X^2=4.645, p \leq .05$
with sibling	21%	50%	$X^2=11.845, p \leq .000$
with parent	5%	0%	$X^2=5.000, p \leq .05$
Child slept in parent's room as a baby	85%	89%	NS
Child did not sleep in parents room as a baby	15%	11%	NS
Hours per week mother worked away from home when child was 1-6 years	$\bar{X}=21$	$\bar{X}=19$	$T=1.86$ NS
Hours per week mother spent at school when child was 1-6 years	$\bar{X}=4$	$\bar{X}=7$	$T=-1.22$ NS
How much time mother spends on an average day (in minutes):			
hug/holding child	$\bar{X}=21$	$\bar{X}=15$	$T=.63$ NS
talking with child	$X=101$	$X=118$	$T=-.43$ NS
playing with child	$X=36$	$X=41$	$T=-.41$ NS
b) Parental behaviors regarding object			
Child received object as a gift	8%	23%	$X^2=7.258, p \leq .01$
Parent did not encourage its use	44%	23%	$X^2=6.582, p \leq .01$
Parent gave it for comfort	27%	9%	$X^2=9.000, p \leq .01$
Parent encouraged to take on trips	56%	85%	$X^2=5.965, p \leq .05$
Parent did not encourage child to sleep with it	44%	23%	$X^2=6.582, p \leq .01$

Table 8 continued

b) Parental behaviors regarding object (cont.)

Parent:			
tolerates object	9%	23%	$X^2=7.355$, $p \leq .01$
resents object	9%	0%	$X^2=9.000$, $p \leq .005$
loves object	9%	0%	$X^2=9.000$, $p \leq .005$
Child received object from someone special	46%	38%	NS
Child received object in a special situation	4%	8%	NS
Object was in crib when child was infant	42%	31%	NS
Parent encouraged object	56%	77%	NS
Parent made object available	33%	23%	NS
Parent gave object to child to sleep with	56%	77%	NS
Parent appreciates object	65%	69%	NS
Parent values object	9%	8%	NS
Major separations between parent and child	26%	22%	NS
No major separations between parent and child	74%	78%	NS

c) Maternal Nurturance $\bar{X}=45$ $\bar{X}=40$ $T=2.76, df=19$ $p \leq .05$

Family Demographic Variables

Parents marital status changed	26%	29%	NS
Parents marital status did not change	74%	71%	NS
Age of mother (years)	$\bar{X} = 36$	$\bar{X} = 35$	$T = .39$ NS
Education of mother (3=trade school, 4=some college, A.A.)	$\bar{X} = 3$	$\bar{X} = 4$	$T = -1.32$ NS
Education of father (3=trade school, 4=some college, A.A.)	$\bar{X} = 3$	$\bar{X} = 4$	$T = -.85$ NS

Summary. In sum, results showed that physical contact had little to do with the persistence of early objects into the middle childhood years. Overall, object persistence was shown to be positively correlated with: 1) children sleeping in their own room; 2) the parent having given the object to the child for comfort; 3) high maternal nurturance; 4) no interference and/or encouragement of object use from mother -- i.e., "neutral" stance.

Current Valued Possessions and Their Meanings

Treasured possessions. When subjects were asked which objects were the most special or important to them, subjects as a total group most often named Stuffed Animals, Blankets, and Sports Equipment (Table 9). There were significant sex differences in the objects named--females named Stuffed Animals ($X^2=7.36$, $p \leq .01$), Dolls ($X^2=11.00$, $p \leq .005$), and Blankets ($X^2=9.78$, $p \leq .005$) more often than males, while males named Sports Equipment ($X^2=27.92$, $p \leq .0000$), Motor Vehicles ($X^2=59.00$, $p \leq .005$), and Small Appliances ($X^2=6.25$, $p \leq .05$) significantly more often than females.

Table 9

Most Frequently Named Treasured Possessions: Relative Percentage By Subject Grouping

Total Group (N=60)		Females (n=40)		Males (n=20)	
Stuffed Anim.	25%	Stuffed Anim.	31%	Sports Equip.	36%
Blankets	14%	Blankets	19%	Collections	14%
Sports Equip.	14%	Dolls	11%	Stuffed Anim.	13%
Collections	11%	Records/Music	10%	Appliances	13%
Records/Music	8%	Collections	9%	Motor Vehicles	9%
Appliances	6%	Jewelry	4%	Childhood Toys	5%
Dolls	6%	Small Appliances	3%	Blankets	4%
Childhood Toys	4%	Childhood Toys	3%	Music	4%
Motor Vehicles	3%	Sporting Equip.	3%	Other	2%
Jewelry	3%	Other	4%		
Other	7%				

Table 10 shows the circumstances under which subjects were most likely to use their most treasured objects in middle childhood. The most common responses were that treasured objects were rarely used but kept in a safe place, played with in the daytime, or used to sleep with at bedtime. In addition, there were significant sex differences with females using their object at bedtime significantly more often than males ($X^2=27.00$, $p \leq .000$), whereas males played with their objects in the daytime significantly more often than females ($X^2=22.56$, $p \leq .000$).

Table 10

Treasured Object Use in Middle Childhood

Total Group (N=60)		Females (n=40)		Males (n=20)	
Rarely Use/ Keep in Safe Place	27%	Rarely Use/ Keep in Safe Place	30%	Play with during Daytime	51%
Played with during Daytime	25%	Bedtime/Sleep	27%	Use Often	18%
Bedtime/Sleep	20%	Use Often	16%	Rarely Use/ Keep Safe Place	18%
Use Often	16%	Played with during Daytime	13%	Bedtime/Sleep	7%
Upset/Sad	8%	Upset/Sad	10%	Upset/Sad	5%

Table 11 shows the children's responses regarding the meanings of their treasured objects. The meanings most often attributed to these objects for the total group were Social and Enjoyment. There were significant sex differences in the meanings named with females naming Nonsocial reasons (e.g., "I got it when I was little") (X^2=5.556, $p \leq .05$) and Social reasons (e.g., "My grandma made it for me") (X^2=28.47, $p \leq .000$) more often than males. Males, however, named Enjoyment (e.g., "It's fun to ride") (X^2=15.51, $p \leq .000$), and Intrinsic Qualities (e.g., " It's worth lots of money"; "It has my favorite baseball team on it") (X^2=28.48, $p \leq .0001$) significantly more often than females.

Table 11

Most Frequently Named Meanings of Treasured Possessions in Middle Childhood

Total Group (N=60)		Female (n=40)		Male (n=20)	
Social	31%	Social	39%	Enjoyment	49%
Enjoyment	27%	Enjoyment	17%	Intrinsic Quality	15%
Intrinsic Quality	12%	Nonsocial	14%	Activity	13%
Activity	11%	Intrinsic Quality	10%	Social	13%
Nonsocial	11%	Activity	10%	Self	6%
Self	8%	Self	9%	Nonsocial	4%
Utilitarian	0%	Utilitarian	0%	Utilitarian	0%

Comparison of early and currently treasured objects and their meanings. There were significant differences between the early and current treasured objects named by children. Results of chi square analyses showed that Pillows/Blankets were named significantly more often in early childhood than in middle childhood ($X^2=14.00, p \leq .000$), whereas Sports Equipment ($X^2=14.000$, $p \leq .000$), Collections ($X^2=11.00$, $p \leq .005$), Records/Music ($X^2=8.00$, $p \leq .001$) and Small Appliances ($X^2=6.000$, $p \leq .05$) were named significantly more often in middle childhood than early childhood (Table 12).

Table 12

Comparison of Most Frequently Named Early and Current Treasured Objects

Early Object		Current Object	
Pillows/Blankets	42%	Stuffed Animals	25%
Stuffed Animals	37%	Pillows /Blankets	14%
Childhood Toys	10%	Sports Equipment	14%
Dolls	7%	Collections	11%
Other (pacifier)	4%	Records/music	8%
		Small Appliances	6%
		Dolls	6%
		Childhood Toys	4%
		Jewelry	3%
		Motor Vehicles	3%
		Other	6%

* Only those object categories mentioned by subjects were included in this table.

There were few significant differences between early and current treasured object meanings. Social meanings were named significantly more often for early objects than for current objects ($X^2=4.070$, $p \leq .05$), and Self was named significantly more often for current than for early objects ($X^2=6.049$, $p \leq .05$) (Table 13).

Table 13

Comparison Between Early and Current Treasured Object Meanings

Early Treasured Object Meanings		Current Treasured Object Meanings	
Social	44%	Social	28%
Enjoyment	22%	Self	26%
Intrinsic Quality	15%	Enjoyment	24%
Self	11%	Intrinsic Quality	10%
Activity	6%	Activity	9%
Utilitarian	2%	Utilitarian	2%
Nonsocial	2%	Nonsocial	2%

Summary. In sum, the most frequently named treasured possessions in middle childhood were Stuffed Animals, Blankets, and Sports Equipment which carried primarily Social, Enjoyment, and Intrinsic Qualities meanings. There were significant sex differences in the objects named with females naming Stuffed animals, Blankets, and Dolls more often than males, while males named more action-oriented objects like Sports Equipment, Motor Vehicles, and Small Appliances than females. There were also significant sex differences in the meanings attributed to these objects with females preferring objects that were special because of the social ties they represented (e.g., Social), and males preferring objects for instrumental reasons (e.g., Enjoyment, Intrinsic Qualities, and Activity). Females tended to use their objects in a more "passive" way (e.g.,

Rarely use/Keep in a Safe Place, Bedtime/Sleep), whereas males tended to use their objects in a more active way (e.g., Play Daytime, Use Often).

In comparison with early treasured objects, results show that Stuffed Animals and Blankets are treasured significantly less in middle childhood. Sports Equipment, Collections, Records/Music and Small Appliances were named significantly more often in middle childhood compared to early childhood. Early and current treasured objects' meanings, however, were fairly similar: Enjoyment was a consistently salient meaning for both age groups, although in early childhood enjoyment referred to comfort and security, while in middle childhood it typically referred to "positive" feelings, or enhancing one's mood. Thus, whereas the significance of certain objects changed with age, the meanings remained relatively similar over time.

DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this exploratory study was, in general, to gain a broader understanding of the meaning and functions of possessions of school-aged children, including how they are used and what they mean for the child, whether early treasured objects persist into the middle childhood years, and also to determine the influence of familial variables on the persistence of early treasured objects. The present study found that whereas the objects that were treasured in early childhood were different from those valued during middle childhood, the meanings stayed virtually the same. Seventy-two percent of school-aged children who originally had a treasured object as a young child still had it in middle childhood, but few reportedly still used it in an active manner. Rather, these objects seemed to play a more "passive", nostalgic role. Also, the few family variables that were related to the persistence of early treasured object use into the middle childhood years included sleeping in one's own room, if the object was given to the child for comfort and security, and if the child's mother was nurturing.

Persistence of Early Objects

Decline in use with age. The finding of the decline in use with age of early objects is consistent with

Winnicott's (1952) remark that with age, children's dependencies on especially valued objects decline (such that eventually they may be no longer needed), and with Coppollilo's (1974) findings that transitional object use slowly becomes extinct through lack of need. Also, these findings are consistent with Sherman et al.'s (1981) and Shafii's (1985) findings on the decline of use of early objects after the early childhood years. Changes with age that may contribute to these trends could include changes in regard to tactile "contact-comfort" and separation-individuation" issues (e.g., Kamptner, under review). Regarding the former, according to the developmental literature and supported by the findings in this study, possessions that are characterized as "soft cuddlies" (e.g., stuffed animals, blankets, or diapers) are what young children tend to become attached to because of the comfort and security they provide. These physical, tactile features of objects (i.e., softness, and provisions for clinging to it) may be more salient for younger children (e.g., Harlow, 1958) than for older individuals who tend to describe and use these objects in more symbolic than active ways (i.e., object reminds them of their past and/or ties with others).

A second reason why early object use may decline with age while other objects become more salient may be interpreted by looking at the psychoanalytic literature

on separation-individuation. From this perspective, the "soft cuddly" objects that children become attached to in early life are thought to symbolically represent the mother (e.g., Winnicott, 1953). During middle childhood, separation-individuation (e.g., developing a distinct sense of self with separate boundaries and becoming more autonomous) is beginning to take place. In an attempt to separate and sever ties with one's mother, relinquishing these objects may symbolically be an expression of this separation-individuation process, and consequently, school-aged children find new objects to value or to be comforting (e.g., Kamptner, under review).

Use of early treasured objects in middle childhood. As mentioned above, for those children who still own their early object, responses as a whole suggested a more passive than active "use" of the object (e.g., the majority of children slept with the object, or rarely used it but kept it on a shelf or bed), and these objects continue to provide enjoyment (e.g., security and comfort), but more importantly "symbolic" meanings (e.g., nostalgic reminders of their owner's personal history) during middle childhood. While these early objects may be kept in a trunk, or on a bed or shelf, they appear to continue to be treasured because they symbolize their owner's past, and/or ties with others. The "nostalgic" meanings attached to these objects are similar to a statement made by Berg

(1982) in regard to adolescent objects--i.e., that they symbolize the memories and illusions of childhood. Therefore, the meanings and functions of these early objects in the middle childhood years appear to be to provide school-aged children with a way by which to experience continuity of self over time, which, according to Erikson (1968), is a necessary component of one's developing sense of self, and not necessarily to provide just comfort and security as in the early childhood years (e.g., Kamptner, under review).

Influence of Family Variables on the Persistence of Early Object Attachments

Physical contact. The findings of the influence of physical contact between mother and child on the persistence of early treasured objects into the middle childhood years are consistent with the studies done on infants by Hong and Townes (1976) and Gaddini & Gaddini (1970). These studies suggest that children who sleep in the same room with their mother are less likely to develop an attachment to a transitional object, whereas children who sleep in their own room are more likely to develop attachments to such objects. These inanimate objects are described as providing comfort and security for their owners at bedtime and during times of stress. When a child sleeps with a parent or sibling they may feel more secure than when alone, whereas children who sleep in their own room may use their

treasured objects to "symbolize" their mother and therefore as a source of comfort, since mother is not directly available for comfort.

Parenting behaviors regarding object. Parenting behaviors towards the treasured object had little effect on the persistence of early objects into the middle childhood years. This finding is consistent with a study done by Busch and McKnight (1973), which found that parents' conscious expectations (i.e., parents actively encouraged the use of a treasured object) of whether a child would attach to an object did not contribute to its use. Parents' unconscious motivations (i.e., parents' internal motives encouraged the use of a treasured object); however, were contributing factors to whether parents were facilitators or "disturbers" of a child's relationship with a treasured object. The infant appears to "create" (i.e., discovers and empowers) the object and uses it to fulfill his or her own needs. In the current study, those parents who did not actively encourage or interfere with the persistence of object attachment may have still facilitated its use on an unconscious level because of the comfort and security it provided for their child. Furthermore, parents who allow the persistence of an object may be those not threatened by its use, and these parents may therefore unconsciously encourage its role in the separation-individuation process. This is consistent with Mahler's

(1975) findings that a transitional object plays a facilitating role in the separation-individuation process by allowing an infant to move away from mother while at the same time holding on to her. Parents who provide "good-enough mothering" through the lifespan allow children the opportunity to separate and individuate. These same parents would encourage self-soothing, security, and comfort in their children. This is perhaps why there was a significant number of parents whose children still have an object who reported giving it to their children for comfort more often than those who did not.

In sum, children "create" and continue the use of treasured objects; however, parents' unconscious motivations for their child to have comfort and security contribute to the persistence of its use.

Influence of a nurturing mother. Transitional object use has been related to mother's nurturing ability (Deri, 1978; Horton & Sharp, 1984). In this study, the results showed that mothers who scored high on the nurturance scale were more likely to have children who kept their objects into the middle childhood years. This is consistent with the literature regarding the development of early object attachment. Children reared without reliable comforting or "good-enough" mothering (i.e., has a sense of being cared for and loved, that contributes to the development of a child's sense of trust) do not develop early

transitional object attachments (Horton & Sharp, 1984; Jonsson and Taje, 1983; Parker, 1979; Provence and Lipton, 1962). Consequently, school-aged children who are deprived of "good enough" mothering or positive nurturing experiences may be less likely to keep treasured objects from early childhood into the middle childhood years. Perhaps the early treasured object represents a longing for, or a reminder of the comfort of the past, and as a child's needs for a positive nurturing experience continually go unmet, the school-aged child may relinquish this early object and turn to other means of comforting himself or herself.

Also, mothers who provide a positive nurturing experience may be less likely to be threatened by the continued use of a treasured object into the middle childhood years and therefore be less likely to discourage its use. The role of a nurturing mother is a strong influence on the persistence of early treasured objects. (However, it should be noted that not all children who have a nurturing mother continue treasured object use in the middle childhood years).

Current Valued Treasured Possessions and their Meanings

Treasured possessions. The results of this study showed that possessions considered to be valued by school-aged children tend to be action-oriented objects (sports equipment, small appliances, and music), as well as the treasured objects of the past. What possessions

these children currently treasure, and the meanings attached to them varied with sex. For males, the most frequently named treasured possessions were action-oriented objects (i.e., sports equipment, collections, and small appliances) that were valued primarily for the enjoyment (i.e., positive feelings) and the intrinsic qualities they provided. In contrast, females most frequently named traditional early treasured objects (i.e., stuffed animals, blankets, and dolls) that continued to provide comfort and security for them. Music and collections were also valued by females because of the enjoyment (i.e., positive feelings) and social-related meanings they provided. These findings suggest that possessions considered by males to be most special tend to be those that require interaction, involve activity and/or have instrumental benefits. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) noted similar results, and stated that enjoyment is salient to the development of the self since it provides for experiences that yield positive feedback to the individual. Current experiences, especially those that are pleasureable, may provide an individual with information about who they are and what they can do (thereby helping them experience feelings of self-efficacy) (Furby, 1978). The salience of such activity for this life stage for males is also evident when one compares the percentages of "enjoyment" meanings for school-aged males (49%), adolescent males (40%), and adult males (24%)

(Kamptner, 1989).

The salience of social meanings for school-aged females may be viewed within the context of reflecting the developing self in middle childhood in several ways. These social relations may play an important part for the developing self by acting as a mirror for one's self, increasing one's self-worth. They also contribute to the development of self by enhancing children's perception of continuity over time (Erikson, 1968). The predominant salience of social meanings for treasured possessions was consistent with findings of adult females (Kamptner, 1989). Perhaps these findings can be explained by Gilligan (1982), who states that a self for females develops and centers around social or interpersonal relationships.

Comparison of early and currently treasured objects and their meanings. Objects especially valued in early childhood, i.e., blankets and teddy bears, continued to be valued in middle childhood, but used in a more passive way. Children in this study reported that objects were kept on a bed, shelf or trunk. Results also showed that they continue to provide comfort and security in the school-aged years by representing a symbol of one's self, one's past, and one's ties with others, but are replaced by more action-oriented objects that are more useful in accomodating the emerging self. This change in object preference and proximity may be a result of the child's

increasing need and subsequent ability to provide a more comprehensive definition of the dynamic self. Some children begin personal interests in collections and music. Males prefer action-oriented objects like sports equipment, small appliances, and games (e.g., nintendo). These objects give males the opportunity to compete with themselves and others, and to provide activity and enjoyment that contribute to the developing self.

In sum, although the objects children treasure become increasingly complex to keep pace with the growing sophistication of the child, the service or function they perform remains fairly consistent. Objects consistently provide enjoyment for their owners, either comfort or positive feelings. This would suggest that perhaps individuals have an innate drive to make themselves happy or "feel good" through the lifespan.

Critique of Study and Future Research

Locating a sufficient number of school-aged males was one of the shortcomings of this study. The method of sample selection for this study, i.e., the voluntary participation of subjects, also limited the generalizability of these findings. Mothers who volunteered to participate in the study, for example, may differ from mothers who did not volunteer to participate. Thus, the possibility of selection bias may be a limiting factor in the present study.

Future studies could address the inconsistencies of parents' vs. children's responses regarding early treasured objects found in this study. Whereas ninety percent of the total sample of children interviewed reported that they had a "treasured" possession as a young child, only seventy-two percent of the parents interviewed reported that their child had a "treasured" possession as a young child. Perhaps this discrepancy was due to the child's desire to respond in a manner that seeks to satisfy the experimenter's expectations. Also, less-than-perfect recall by the reporting parent cannot be ruled out as a contributing factor to the discrepancy. Memories are subject to error because they are partially reconstructed, and people tend to elaborate on them over a certain period of time (Loftus, 1991). Furthermore, subjective perceptions can be wrong.

Lastly, the role of the father in children's development of, and persistence of, object attachments would be worthwhile to examine. No research today has examined this relationship.

Implications and Conclusions

It can be inferred from this study that the persistence of early treasured object use in middle childhood is normal, healthy, and beneficial during times of stress. Other studies have demonstrated the positive ways these early objects function for young children (i.e., represent mother,

provide comfort and security, decrease and regulate anxiety, facilitate in the separation-individuation process, contribute to a separate sense of self, and aid in the development of symbolic thinking). Consequently, parents, pediatricians, and child psychologists can rest assured when persistence of these early objects continue into the middle childhood years.

Since children create and empower these objects, ideally they are the ones who give up their objects when they are no longer needed. Mothers who provide a nurturing experience do not appear to be threatened by the object, and therefore allow children the freedom to relinquish their early treasured object on their own timetable.

The ways in which possessions function during middle childhood (i.e., provide comfort and security, represent interpersonal and familial ties, provide activity and enjoyment, provide for experiences of self-control and self-efficacy, assist in the separation-individuation process, and symbolize the self) suggest that these possessions contribute to both the development and expression of the self during middle childhood, as children are exploring and developing who they are. This is in accordance with the results of a study done by Rochberg-Halton (1984), which concluded that the early part of life is spent in the development of one's self, while the latter part of adulthood is spent on the

cultivation of one's self. The objects that children treasure are outgrowths of their own developing self. They are the conduit that bring the opportunity to express and cultivate their individuality, i.e., that unique combination of talents, interests, motivations, and curiosities, to themselves and others. By encouraging the exploration and use of these objects, parents can facilitate and accelerate their child's ability to find and foster their own, original, unique identity.

APPENDIX I

Dear Parents:

Attached is a request for your assistance from Myra Coleman, our school counselor who comes to us once a week from Redlands/Yucaipa Guidance Clinic. With the consent of parents, she works with children at our school who have needs for personal counseling.

She is now working on her Master's thesis and would like to have the assistance of as many 5th grade families as possible in accomplishing her goal. I am happy to recommend her as a responsible professional who will use any information you choose to provide in an appropriate manner.

Your participation in her project is purely voluntary. Please feel free to provide or not provide information as you prefer. If you have any questions, please call me at 795-2426.

Sincerely,

Mollie Vanderzyl

MOLLIE VANDERZYL
Principal

APPENDIX II

Child Interview

We are interested in finding out about the personal belongings that you have at home -- those that are most important or special to you, and why you like them. I have some questions I'd like to ask you about your favorite possessions -- those you have now and also ones that you liked when you were little. Are you ready to start?

I. This section refers to your earliest favorite object.

1. When you were very young (1- to 4-years old), did you have any special toys or objects that were especially important to you? That you liked the most? (For example, a blanket, teddy bear, stuffed animal, red fire truck, etc.) Tell me about them.

What was the object?	Why was it special to you?
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. Of these things that you just named, which one of these was the MOST special or important to you?

_____

a) Do you have a name for this object?

yes _____ no _____

What is it? _____

3. Why do you think this object was the most special to you?

_____

4. When did you use this object? (For example, at bedtime, when you were lonely and afraid, when you were playing, etc.)

_____

5. Do you still have this object? _____ yes _____ no

(If yes):

a) Do you "use" or play with this object now?
_____ yes _____ no

When? _____

b) Is this object still really special to you now? _____ yes _____ no

c) Why do you think you still have this object?
_____

(If no): If you no longer have this object, why not?
_____

What happened to it?
_____

II. The next questions refer to the things that you have now that you like the most.

6. Of all the things that you own now, which are the most special or most important to you? (Please do not name living things like people or pets).

Name of object	Why is it special	When do you use

7. Of these objects, which one is the most special to you?
_____
Tell me about this object: _____
_____

8. Why do you think this object is more special to you you than the others?
_____

Section III: Background Information

9. How old are you? _____
10. What grade are you in? _____
11. Gender: male female

_____

Thank you very much for helping me out here. Do you have any questions?

APPENDIX III

MOTHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Mothers:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study of school-aged children's possessions. This questionnaire is designed to provide information regarding the fate of these first treasured objects, activities in the home related to their use, and current objects that may be especially valued by your child.

There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to any of the questions. Your answers will remain completely confidential. Please think carefully about each question before answering and try to answer each one as honestly as you can. Your candid response to each question will be appreciated.

When the questionnaire is completed, please mail it back to us in the enclosed self-addressed envelope by March 1st. We hope to have the results of this study available in early Spring and will mail them to you then if you are interested.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at the number listed below. We greatly appreciate your-- and your child's-- participation in our study!

Sincerely,

Myralynn Coleman, M.A. candidate

Laura Kamptner, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, CA 92407
(714) 880-5582

SECTION I: Your Child's Earliest Treasured Objects:

1. Did your child have a particular blanket, stuffed animal, toy, etc. that he/she was attached to when he/she was an infant or young child (i.e., between 0 - 4 years old)?

YES ( ) NO ( )

IF YOUR RESPONSE IS NO-- QUESTIONS 2 - 6 DO NOT APPLY. SKIP DOWN TO SECTION II (QUESTION #7).

2. What was this object? _____

a) Why do you think your child was attached to this object?

_____

b) When did your child use it? _____

_____

3. Please describe how your child became "introduced" to this object (i.e., did you give the object to your child? Did you encourage your child to use it in any way? etc.)

_____

_____

4. After your child was introduced to this object, did you encourage your child to continue using it in any way?
_____ yes _____ no

Describe: _____

_____

a) Did you encourage your child to take the object with him or her on trips? _____ yes _____ no

Describe: _____

_____

b) Did you encourage your child to have it with him or her when s/he went to sleep? _____ yes _____ no

Describe: _____

5. How did you "feel" about the object? (i.e., do you appreciate, value, tolerate, resent, etc.) Describe:

_____

6. Does your child still have this object?

____ yes ____ no

a. If no, at what age was object given up? _____

Please explain how object was given up? _____

_____

_____

SECTION II: Physical separations between you and your child:

7. When your child was between the ages of 1 - 6 years, were there any major separations between you and your child? _____ yes _____ no

Describe: _____

_____

a) Did your marital status change during this time?

_____ yes _____ no

If so, how did it change? _____

b) Did your marital status change when your child was 6 to 10 years old? _____ yes _____ no

If so, how did it change? _____

8. When your child was between the ages of 1 to 6-years, approximately how many hours did you work away from home at a given week? _____ hrs.

a) Did your work schedule ever change?

_____ yes _____ no

If it did change, how old was your child at the time of the change? _____ years

9. When your child was between the ages of 1 to 6-years, how many hours did you spend at school or other (non-job related) activities during a given week? _____ hrs.

10. Did your child sleep in your room when you first brought him or her home from the hospital after birth?

____ yes ____ no

a) If no, where did (s)he sleep? _____

b) If your child initially slept in your bedroom, how old was (s)he when this arrangement changed? _____yrs.

Decribe how the sleeping arrangements changed:_____

_____

11. Where does (s)he sleep now? _____

Who else now sleeps in the bedroom with the child?

_____

SECTION III: Your child's current "most treasured" possession:

12. What would you say is your child's current most "treasured" or most favorite possession?

_____

13. How do you "feel" about the object? (i.e, do you appreciate, value, tolerate, resent, etc., the object?

Describe: _____

14. How did your child become introduced to this object?

_____

15. After the child was introduced to this object, did you encourage continued use of it in any way?

_____ yes _____no

Explain: _____

16. How many hours do you currently work away from home during an average week? _____ hrs.

17. How many hours do you spend at school or other (non-job related) activities during an average week? _____ hrs.

SECTION IV: Things you do with your child:

18. How much time would you say that you spend doing the following activities with your child on an average day:

(Time in minutes)

a) hugging/holding child _____

b) talking with child _____

c) reading to child _____

d) playing with child _____

SECTION V:

For the next four questions, a situation is described that involves an interaction between an adult and child. Please think about your interactions with your child and imagine what your reactions would be if you were in these situations with him or her. It is important that you keep your interactions with your particular child in mind while you answer.

Below each child situation, you will find a number of possible responses listed. On the right you will find five columns that describe the likelihood of your responding in this manner with the person we are asking you about. If the situation as described does not fit in with what has happened to you and this child in the past, try to imagine a similar situation and what you did at that time.

19. You have had a bad day and are feeling irritable. You ask the child to do something that you know he is capable of and he refuses.

	Always	Alot	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
a) Express your concern about the child's welfare in great detail when he refuses to take care of himself.	____	____	____	____	____
b) When you are certain he is too frustrated to try, help do it.	____	____	____	____	____
c) Let him learn on his own that bad things can happen when he misbehaves.	____	____	____	____	____

20. You are getting ready to take your child somewhere and he is making you late by getting ready too slow. You are late for a very important appointment and will get in a great deal of trouble because you are late.

	Always	Alot	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
a) Praise and hug him for what he has done so far; very calmly ask him to hurry.	____	____	____	____	____
b) It is your reputation at stake. Make him hurry.	____	____	____	____	____
c) Hug the child to let him know he is cared for and help him get ready.	____	____	____	____	____

21. The child has just performed a task that he has not been able to do before. You have worked very hard to teach your child the task.

	Always	Alot	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
a) Cheerfully ask him to describe how he did it.	____	____	____	____	____
b) Hug the child and give him a reward.	____	____	____	____	____
c) Tell the child how happy you are and that he will be able to care for himself more now.	____	____	____	____	____

22. Your child is playing in a situation in which he could be hurt if he is not careful and has been in this situation several times before.

a) Strongly encourage the child away from the situation and ask him if he is alright.	____	____	____	____	____
b) Let him learn that it is a dangerous situation by allowing him to continue.	____	____	____	____	____
c) Tell the child you're glad he is alright after making sure he is out of danger.	____	____	____	____	____

SECTION V: General Information:

23. Your age: _____

24. Your current marital status (check one):
___ single
___ married
___ separated/divorced
___ widowed
___ other (_____)

25. What is your ethnic background? (check one):
___ Asian
___ Black
___ Caucasian
___ Hispanic
___ other: _____

26. a) What is the highest level of education you have completed?
(check one):____ have not finished high school
____ graduated from high school
____ trade school
____ some college (includes A.A. degree)
____ graduated from college (B.A./B.S.)
____ some post-graduate work
____ graduate or professional degree
(specify:_____)

b) If you are currently married: what is the highest level of education that your spouse has completed:
(check one):____ have not finished high school
____ graduated from high school
____ trade school
____ some college (include A.A. degree)
____ graduated from college (B.A./B.S.)
____ some post-graduate work
____ graduate or professional degree

Thank you very much for participating in this study! Please mail this questionnaire back to us in the self-addressed envelope.

APPENDIX IV

Letter of Consent

Dear Moms,

Children under the age of four often have certain belongings (such as a blanket or a stuffed animal) that they are especially attached to. We currently know very little about what these early treasured objects mean to children as they grow older. We also don't know what happens to these objects after the early childhood years. To answer these questions, we are doing an in-depth study of school-aged children's earliest and current "most" treasured possessions and their meanings at Cal State University, San Bernardino, and would like your permission to include you and your child in our study.

Participation is completely voluntary, and of course, you may withdraw from involvement in this study at any time. Participation simply involves having you fill out a brief questionnaire on: 1) your child's earliest treasured object; 2) activities in the home; and 3) your child's current "most treasured" possession. In addition, I would like your permission to conduct a brief (10-15 minute) interview with your child (during your child's regular class sessions at school) to find out from your child his or her feelings about his or her first treasured object and his or her current most treasured objects. No identifying information will be used -- anonymity and confidentiality are assured. Only group data will be reported; no individual data will be released. This project has been approved by California State University, San Bernardino, and is also supported by Mrs. Burmeister, the principal here at Yucaipa Elementary.

If you and your child would be willing to help us out in this study, please sign the attached permission form on the following page and return it to your child's teacher by October 15, 1991.

Sincerely,

Myra Coleman, M.A. candidate

Laura Kamptner, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, CA 92407
(714) 880-5582

I, _____, give my permission
(mother's full name)

for Myra Coleman to interview my child,

_____, about his/her first special
(child's full name)

object and current treasured objects.

I would like a copy of the results from this project:

_____ yes _____ no

Address:_____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Teacher: _____

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